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SUBJECT: BRAZIL: IS THE MILITARY THE SOLUTION TO THE CRIME  
PROBLEM?

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Public concern in Brazil over steadily rising crime and a murder rate more than four times that in the United States has re-fueled a two-decade old debate over the question of deploying the military to undertake urban crime fighting missions. Enthusiasm for this idea increased in the aftermath of the Pan Am games, when the military carried out a support role in providing security and helped prevent any incidents from marring the games. Defense Minister Jobim, while not voicing outright support for the idea, has declined to rule it out. Various polls have consistently shown public support it. In mid-June, however, 11 soldiers from an Army unit deployed to a Rio slum as security for a social project handed three youths over to drug traffickers, who subsequently killed them. The incident has brought the debate over the military's proper internal role to the front pages of newspapers throughout the country.

Despite a lower court ruling ordering the Army to withdraw from the "favela", Minister Jobim continues to argue that the Army was deployed legally and should not withdraw. The debate over whether to deploy the military to take on crime in urban areas, which is already taking place in an ad-hoc fashion, will not be fully resolved until Congress addresses the matter legislatively. Until then, the executive is likely to see internal military deployments as a tool too tempting and politically useful to forgo during public security crises. End summary.

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Society at the Breaking Point, Something Must be Done  
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¶2. (U) President Lula took office during a record year for homicides, with some 51,000 recorded throughout Brazil in ¶2003. Since then, the country has seen an eight percent reduction in homicides to about 46,600 in 2006, with drops of about 5.1 percent in 2004, 1.6 percent in 2005, and 1.9 percent in 2006. Nevertheless, the murder rate in Brazil is still on the order of 25 per 100,000 people, over four times the murder rate in the United States (according to the FBI's annual Crime in the United States report, the U.S. rate stood at 5.7 per 100,000 in 2006). Newspapers earlier this year trumpeted the headline that total homicides during the last 30 years are approaching the staggering figure of 1 million (in the 27 years from 1979 through the last year of released

official data, the figure stood at approximately 900,000, compared with a little over 500,000 for the U.S. in the same time period). Of these murders, almost half occurred in the ten-year period between 1997 and 2006 (compared to 165,000 in the United States). Since 1991, homicide trends in Brazil and the U.S. have taken opposite courses: through 2006 the U.S. homicide rate had dropped 31 percent, while Brazil's rate increased 51 percent.

13. (U) Despite the drop in the absolute number of homicides during the first three years of the Lula administration, the number of homicides in most areas of the country remained flat or increased. That is because most of the drop is attributable to a reduction in homicides in Sao Paulo, which alone is responsible for 70 percent of the drop in the homicide rate for Brazil since 2003. Its homicide rate has fallen 54 percent during that time, from 5,591 total murders in 2003 to 2,546 in 2006, placing its homicide rate of 31 per 100,000 people lowest among Brazil's 13 cities of more than one million inhabitants. Major-city murder capital Recife (90.5), Belo Horizonte (56.6) Rio de Janeiro (44.8), Curitiba (44.7) and even Brasilia's metropolitan area (33.3) rank higher (according to the FBI the three U.S. cities with the highest homicide rates are Detroit (47), Baltimore (43), and New Orleans (37)). (Note: Violent crime statistics are collected by state governments, which have unreliable systems for data collection and in many instances do not keep track of some forms of violent crime or do not report these to the central government. As a result, they are often difficult or impossible to find, and where they exist, they are less

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reliable than U.S. statistics. End note.)

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Time for the Military to Step In?  
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14. (U) As a result of these flat or increasing rates of homicides in most parts of the country, not to mention the constant barrage of TV and newspaper headlines blaring news of often shocking and brutal criminal acts, fears of violent crime remains consistently top the list of concerns for most Brazilians. In addition, many Brazilians believe that the Military Police (regular uniformed police of each state with a "military" rank structure) is corrupt and lacks the firepower to take on organized crime networks and drug-trafficking gangs. This is reflected in polling that shows widespread and steady support for an increased role by Brazil's armed forces in providing public security. According to a 2005 survey the daily newspaper O Globo, 90 percent of the public favored a military role; in a 2007 survey reported weekly newsmagazine Veja, support remained strong and steady at 88 percent, a preference that is helped by high public confidence in the military, which hovers around then 70 percent mark. Even a poll of service members that appeared in the same edition of Veja showed that some 63 percent either supported or are at least open to the idea of deploying the military internally, depending on the situation. Media outlets often fuel debate by questioning the presence of 190,000 soldiers posted to bases in urban areas, when there are no evident national defense missions to perform in those areas.

15. (U) Since Minister Nelson Jobim took over the Defense portfolio, he and various commanders have openly contemplated the idea of involving the military in urban crime fighting missions, lauding the military's preparedness to taking on that role. Colonel Claudio Barro Magno Filho, commander of the Brazilian troops in the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) was quoted in the daily newspaper Estado de Sao Paulo in 2007 noting that the peacekeeping mission was serving as a laboratory to put into practice the planning that had been done for similar operations that might be put in place within Brazil. He noted that under the right conditions--political support and integration of all law

enforcement entities on the ground--the Brazilian military could succeed in carrying out anti-crime operations similar to those it was undertaking under MINUSTAH. During an April 9 hearing before the Chamber of Deputies, Jobim suggested that such a role for the military could be considered, but only after an improved legal framework allowing such deployments was passed in Congress.

¶6. (U) The idea of using the military in this way is far from new. At the end of the military regime more than two decades ago the military suffered an identity crisis as its influence waned and elected democratic civilian governments consolidated their power, but the topic remained hotly debated within the Brazilian military and civilian society. Since then the military has been enlisted to act internally several dozen times, usually in limited short-term missions such as protecting heads of state attending the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 and the Mercosul Summit in Rio in 2006, and occasionally, as in Operation Rio in 1994, to combat organized crime and drug traffickers.

¶7. (U) The Lula government has approved military deployments for internal security purposes several times since it came to power in 2003. That year, at the request of the Rio de Janeiro state government, it approved the use of the military to augment police patrols. In 2006, under a judicial warrant, the military was allowed to occupy eight favelas to retrieve weapons stolen from the military compound. Most recently, the Army helped support security preparations for the Pan American games in 2007 at the request of Rio State

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Governor Sergio Cabral (a strong Lula ally). Prior to the Pan Am games, Justice Minister Tarso Genro affirmed that the military could act in public security without violating the constitution in their role as guarantors of law and order, and as long as its mission was well defined, limited in duration, and agreed to by the governor of the state in which they would be present.

¶8. (U) In fact, in part because of the numerous occasions for which it had been called to deploy internally, in 2004 the Army converted the 11th Brigade of the Southeast Military Command based out of Campinas, Sao Paulo into a light infantry brigade with a formal "guarantee of law and order" or "GLO" mission. Now known informally as the "Brigada GLO," it specializes in urban conflict, use of non-lethal munitions, and anti-riot actions, and is trained to undertake operations against narcotraffickers and organized crime.

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A Bump in the Road  
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¶9. (U) On June 16th, 2008, three youths between the ages of 17 and 24 years old from the "Morro da Providencia", a favela in Rio de Janeiro, were killed by drug traffickers after being abducted by Army soldiers deployed to the favela, who "sold" them to rival drug dealers. Eleven officers from the Western Military Command were involved, and three of them have already confessed their participation in the crime. The Brazilian Army had been occupying the "Morro da Providencia" for six months to provide security for workers of the Programa Cimento Social (Social Cement Program), an initiative of current federal deputy and Rio mayoral candidate Marcelo Crivella. The State Secretary of Public Security, Jose Beltrame, as well as the Brazilian Bar Association have strongly criticized the presence of the Brazilian Army in the favela, claiming they have no expertise in public security. A lower court judged ruled that the Army had to exit the favela, a decision the federal government is appealing. Both Jobim and Army Chief of Staff General Enzo Peri have defended the legality of the Army's presence and its mission, which was to provide security so that a social development project could be completed in an economically distressed area dominated by drug traffickers. (Note:

Without military protection, the social project has been suspended.)

¶10. (SBU) Though the federal military's presence in Rio in the lead-up to the 2007 Pan Am Games was publicly heralded as a success, many Consulate contacts (including state public security officials) have expressed their view that the deployment did not have any lasting positive effect on the security situation. Rather, they say, the military deployment in advance of the Games was a calculated political move on the part of the new Governor to counter Rio's negative reputation as a dangerous city. The military, along with state police forces, conducted several high-profile "raids" in favelas to send drug traffickers the message that the Pan Am Games needed to take place without incident. Rio was uncharacteristically calm during the Games, but returned to "normal" shortly after the international delegations and tourists departed.

¶11. (SBU) A significant consequence of the military's presence in Rio's favelas is that corrupt members of the military have become part of the problem. Corrupt soldiers terrorize residents and demand protection money. Some Consulate NGO contacts report that the security situation in the favelas has actually deteriorated since the military's deployment because now there are several competing elements jockeying for power-- drug traffickers, corrupt local police (militias), and corrupt soldiers. In many cases, residents are pressured and threatened by all of these groups.

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A Risky Proposition  
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¶12. (U) Even before the incidents in Rio, some defense experts had sounded a note of caution towards the idea of deploying the military in this way, noting that training for war and to provide public security were incompatible and that the legacy of two decades of military repression still lingered in people's minds. In a meeting with poloff Joanisval Brito, a Senate legislative advisor and that body's leading expert on national defense issues, stated that it would be unwise to employ the military for anything other than temporary and limited missions, such as emergency response or providing security for international events-- which are already allowable under current law. Open-ended public security missions are fraught with risks, he noted, because they have the potential of corrupting the military--eroding confidence in it--and require wholesale changes in training, doctrine, and in Brazilian laws. The only way the Congress could see itself pressured into allowing such actions would be for Brazil to suffer a continuous series of high-profile incidents of such shocking nature that the Congress would have no choice but to act to provide broad authority for these types of missions.

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Comment  
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¶13. (SBU) For the moment, the pendulum has swung against deploying the military for these kinds of domestic missions. Once the next wave of high-profile criminal acts takes place, however, it will probably swing back again. There is no constitutional question as to whether the military may deploy for internal security purposes, as that is already allowed by the constitution. The issue Brazilians are grappling with is how broadly these internal missions may be defined. Settling this question is essential to formalize a legal regime allowing for the systematic use of the military in a range of public security roles, in place of the current haphazard and ad hoc use of the military whenever public pressure to do something about crime builds to the boiling point. It is not clear that Brazil's congress is prepared to act on the matter

at this point. Until then, the pendulum will keep swinging with the headlines of the day. We doubt that any Brazilian government will permanently rule out deploying the military for internal security purposes so long as it remains a temptingly simple, popular, and politically useful tool for addressing public security crises. End comment.

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